DARK HORSE MANGA
BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL
106
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CAULDRON & AN OPEN PIT
48 PAGES
HIROAKI SAMURA
BLADE
OF THE IMMORTAL
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BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

MANJI
Immortal *rōnin* vowed to protect Rin and aid her in her quest for revenge

RIN
Last heir of the Mutenichi *ryū dōjō* destroyed by the Ittō-*ryū*, seeks Anotsu's death

ANOTSU
The leader of the Ittō-*ryū* sword school, targeted by the Mugai-*ryū*

HABAKI KAGIMURA
Powerful manipulative Mugai-*ryū* leader and *bangashira* serving the Shogun

HYAKURIN
Mugai-*ryū* assassin, recovering from torture at the hands of Ittō-*ryū* renegades

GIICHI
Mugai-*ryū* assassin, reeling from the death of his son

THE STORY SO FAR

Infected by *kessen-chu*, mystical bloodworms which can heal all wounds and grant their host immortality, Manji's bloodthirst led to the capture and murder of his sister. To atone for this and for the 100 innocent people who died at his hand while he served a corrupt lord, Manji vowed to slay 1,000 evil men in exchange for the release of death.

Habaki Kagimura orchestrates a surprise attack at a lavish banquet that decimates a batch of new Ittō-*ryū* recruits. With ten core followers still alive, Anotsu rallies his surviving warriors together to dish out vengeance and rededicate themselves to his ideals. After sparring with Giichi, Manji agrees to meet with the mysterious Kagimura at a *bakufu* stronghold near Edo Castle.

designer **DEBRA BAILEY** editor **PHILIP SIMON** publisher **MIKE RICHARDSON**

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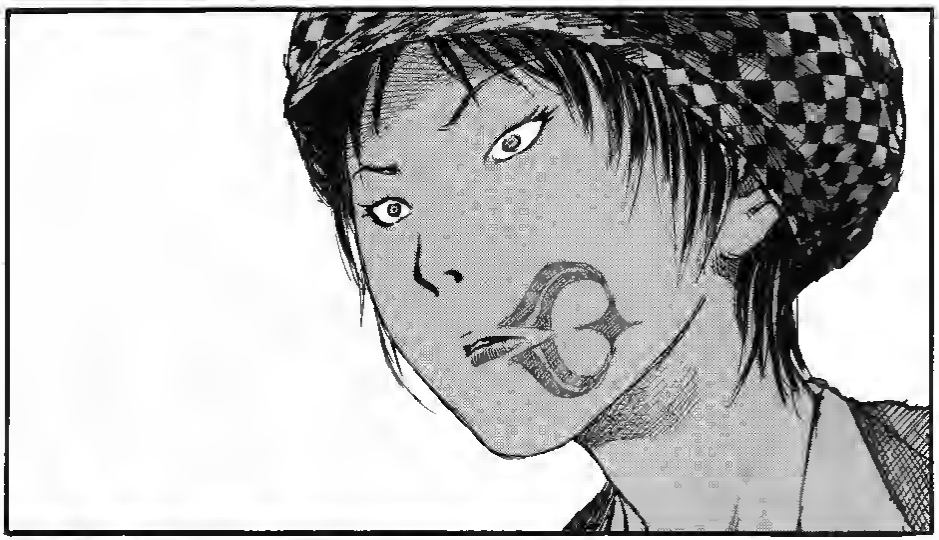
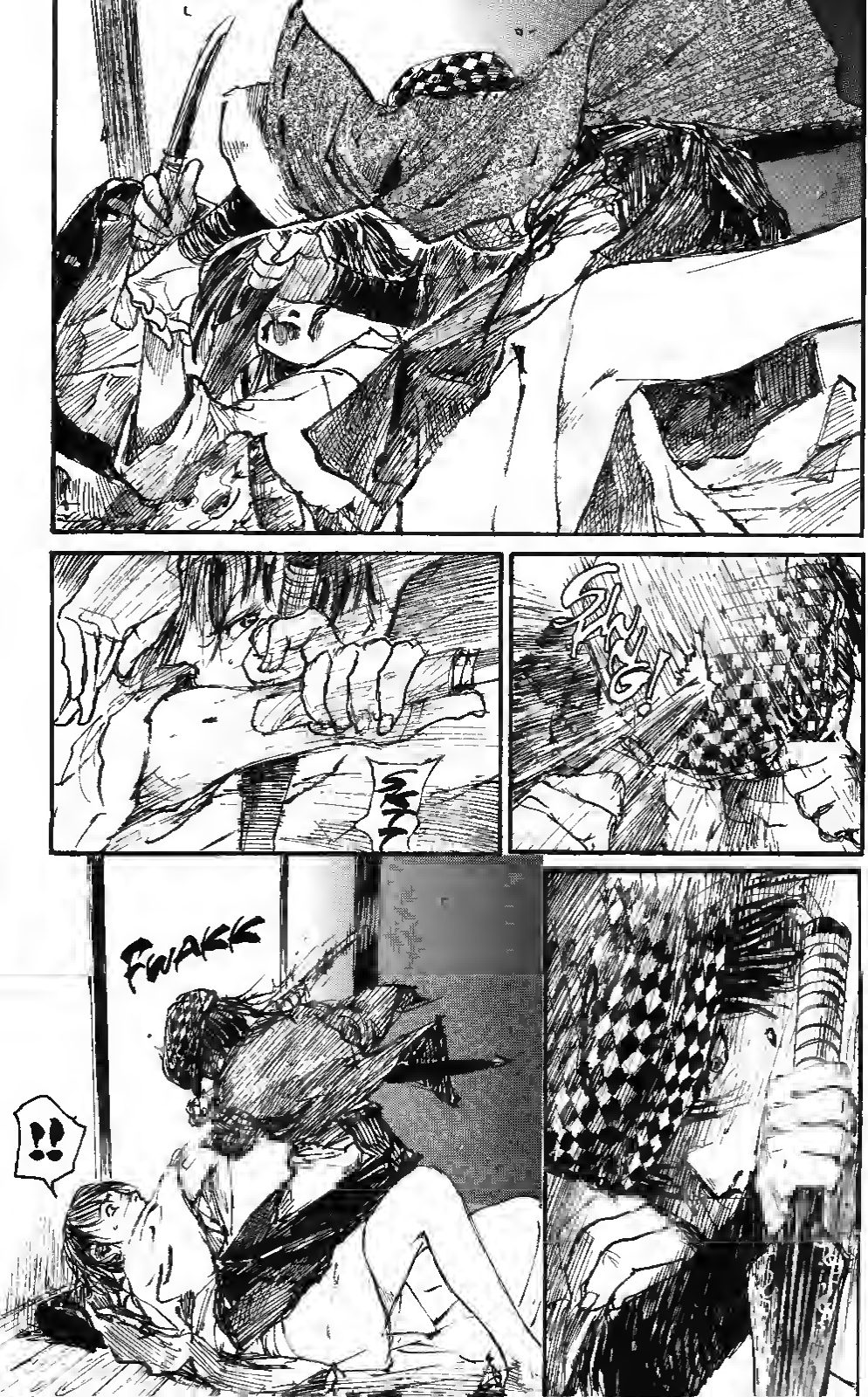
無限の住人

CAULDRON



JUST L- LEAVIN'...
OHH! S-S- SORRY!

AH?!
DŌA!!

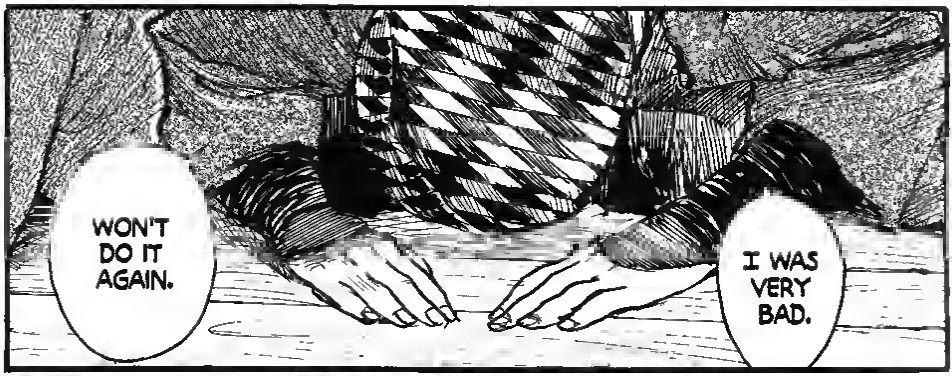

SWING!
FWAKK
!!

WHSSHH!!!
FWHA

DŌA, NO...
OUCH, OUCH, OUCH! THAT HURT!
S-SORRY. BUT WHAT YOU JUST DID?
AIN'T THAT... BACK TO THE OLD WAYS?
RIGHT, DŌA? REMEMBER? YOU SAID?
THIS AFTER-NOON?

...GOOD GIRL...
PRAY TO GOD... P-PLEASE EXCUSE US.
I DON'T THINK SHE WAS REALLY GONNA HURT YOU.
IT'S JUST AN OLD... HABIT.
OLD HABIT...?!
AH?! HEY...

WHAT? WHY-- WHY ARE YOU GUYS KNEELING?
BOTH OF YOU?
WE, UH...
PLEASE, MA'AM...
FIRST, TAKE YOUR SANDALS OFF IN A HOUSE!
WHAT NOW?!
JUST ONE NIGHT...
I'M GONNA PUT UP FOLKS WHO TRY TO KILL ME AT FIRST SIGHT?!


I WAS VERY BAD.
WON'T DO IT AGAIN.

.....
.....
.....

WHAT'S *WITH* THIS GIRL...?

AH... HONESTLY WE...
HONESTLY, WE JUST GOT *HOMELESS*.

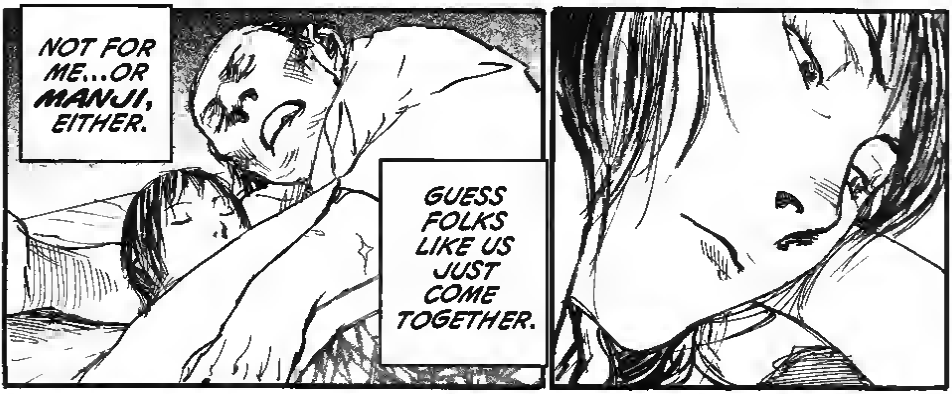
HAD A HOME. UNTIL SUN-UP...
...THEN IT BURNED DOWN. HONEST
TH-THAT'S WHY WE'RE LOOKING FOR A NEW HIDEAWAY.
BET YOU CAN'T KEEP A STRAIGHT FACE...

WE JUST... DRIFTED HERE. FROM THE FAR NORTH.
NO FRIENDS TO HELP US.
WE'LL FIND A PLACE TO LIVE--
--TOMOR-ROW.
SO...SO PLEASE...
GOD, THIS IS JUST TOO MUCH.
LIKE, I'M IN ANY SHAPE TO HELP THEM.
LOOK...
LOOK. I'LL BE HONEST.
WHEN YOU SAW IT WAS OCCUPIED...
..I FIGURED YOU'D LEAVE.

IT'S QUICKER TO WASTE HER--
SHUSH, DŌA...
I HEARD YOU TALKING OUTSIDE.
I KNOW YOU'RE NOT ROBBERS...
OH, WHAT THE HECK.
I'M LEAVING TOMORROW, TOO... MAYBE FOR A LONG TIME.
THEY SAY A HOUSE...
...FALLS APART WITHOUT ITS PEOPLE.

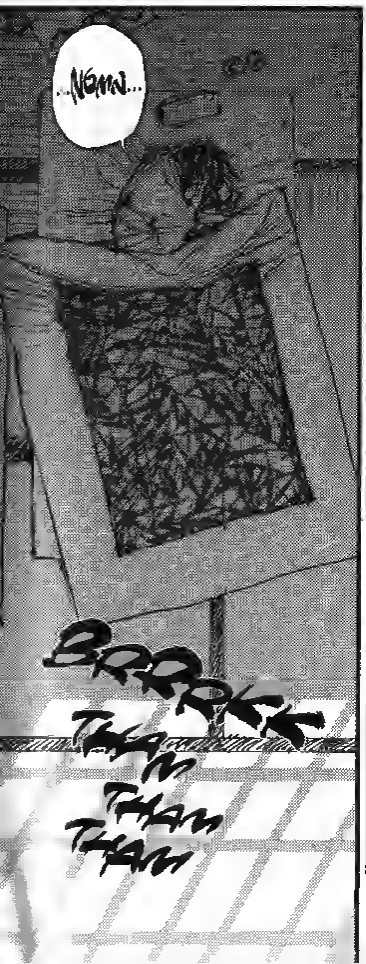
YOU CAN STAY HERE A BIT.
SO, IT'S FINE WITH ME.
GOD KNOWS WHO MIGHT SHOW UP, OR WHAT MIGHT *HAPPEN*.
THIS HOUSE...
A *LOT'S* GONE DOWN IN THIS HOUSE.
ONLY!

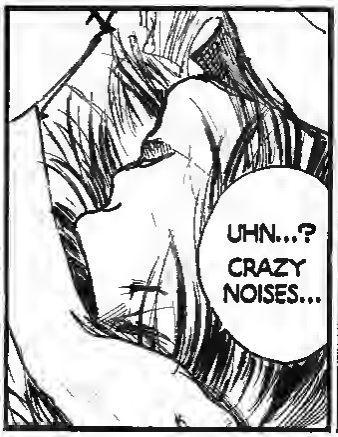
HEE HEE HEE! SHAMO SWALLOW THAT KNEELING CRAP.
DŌA, THAT'S NOT NICE...
DOESN'T LOOK LIKE...
...THE WORLD'S AN EASY PLACE FOR THEM.


NOT FOR ME...OR MANJI, EITHER.
GUESS FOLKS LIKE US JUST COME TOGETHER.

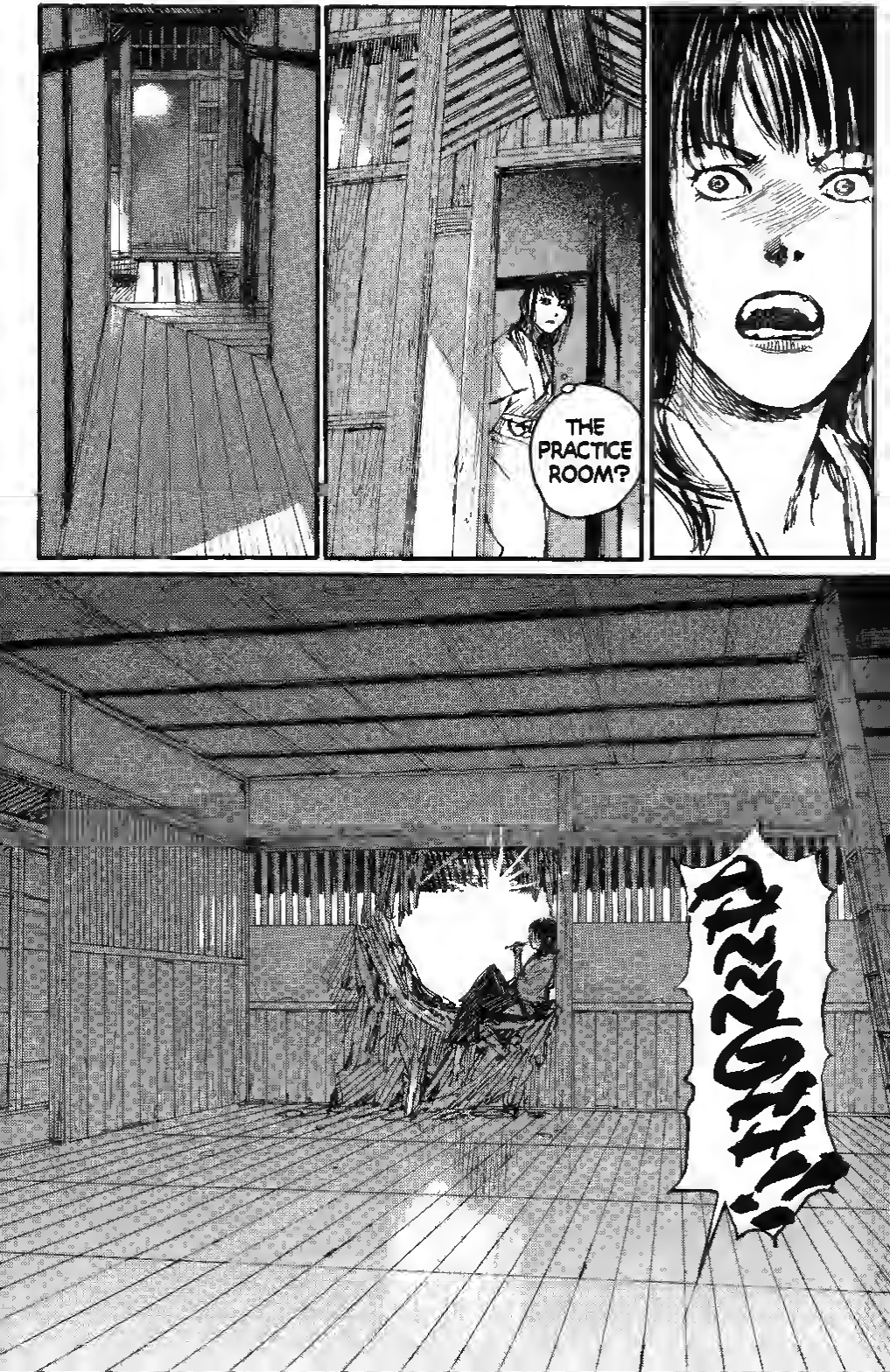
TOMORROW, I'LL FIND YOU, MANJI.

SKRASSH!
KREEK
KREEK


...NGNN...
BRRRK
THAM
THAM
THAM


UHN...?
CRAZY NOISES...

.....
.....
.....

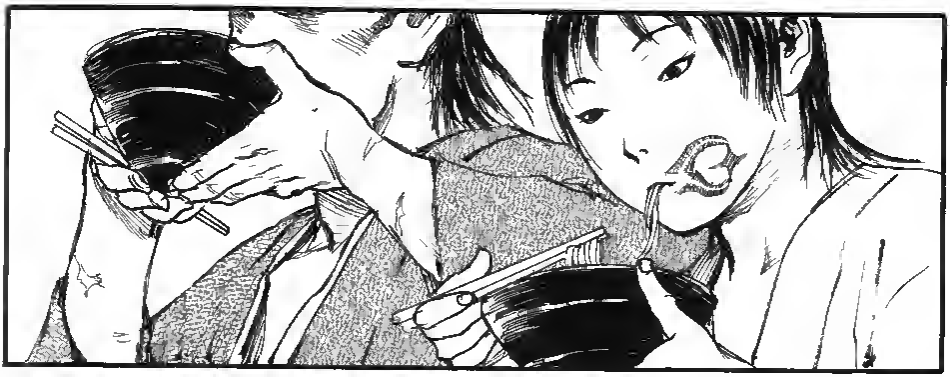

THE PRACTICE ROOM?
AHHHH!!

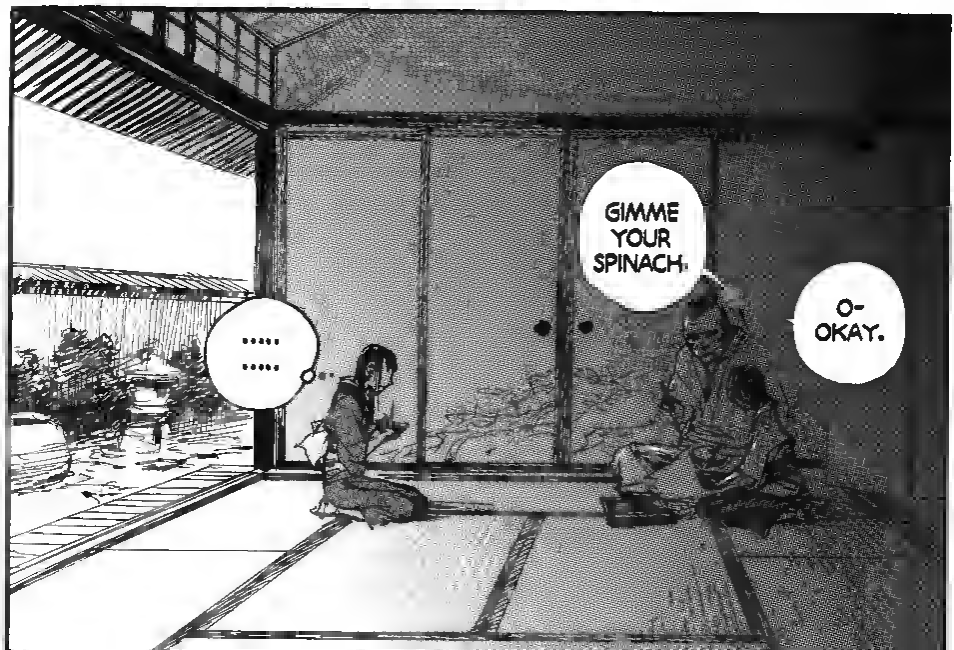
WHAT... D'YA THINK YOU'RE DOING?
.....
SMOKING...?

無限の住人

AN OPEN PIT

RIGHT NOW, I AM BITTERLY REGRET-TING THIS.




GIMME YOUR SPINACH.
O-OKAY.
.....
.....

ALL I'VE BEEN ABLE TO DRAG OUT OF THEM SINCE LAST NIGHT...
...IS THAT HE'S CALLED ISAKU YASONO-OKAMI.
ODDLY ENOUGH, HE'S MILD-MANNERED FOR HIS HUGE SIZE... AND KINDA WIMPY.
HE BLABBED ABOUT COMING FROM THE NORTH, SO I JUST ASSUMED HE WAS ONE OF THOSE EZO PEOPLE. THAT'S NOT A KIND OF FACE YOU SEE AROUND HERE.
TODAY, THOUGH, IN THE BRIGHT LIGHT...
...I CAN LOOK REAL CARE-FULLY.
HE HAS BLUE EYES.
HIS HAIR'S BLACK... BUT HE COULD BE ONE OF THOSE SOUTHERN BARBARIANS.

MAYBE THAT'S WHY HE TALKS FUNNY. BUT FOR ALL THAT, HE ANSWERS STRAIGHT WHEN I ASK.
IF THEY'RE GOING TO BE LIVING HERE, I'LL HAVE TO ASK HIM FOR THEIR STORY, SOONER OR LATER.
SHLRPP
AND THEN...
...THERE'S THAT GIRL, DOA YOSHINO.
NO. THAT "BITCH." I GOTTA RIGHT TO CALL HER THAT.

I CAN'T TELL FROM HER LOOKS IF THE BITCH IS YOUNGER THAN ME OR NOT.
I GUESS I JUST THINK SHE IS BECAUSE SHE'S SO SHORT.
BUT SHE HAS TO BE YOUNGER THAN ISAKU.
YET WHEN SHE-THE-BITCH SPEAKS, IT'S USUALLY TO ORDER HIM AROUND.
JUST LIKE SOME BOSSY OLD MAID, OR A SPOILED PRINCESS WITH HER RETAINER.
JUST WATCHING THEM INTERACT, I KNOW HIS LIFE REVOLVES AROUND DOA.
AND, FOR WHATEVER REASON...
...WITH ME, SHE LETS HIM DO ALL THE TALKING.
MAYBE SHE'S JUST UNCOMFORT-ABLE WITH STRANGERS ? BUT...
...IT FEELS LIKE SHE MOVES THROUGH LIFE TALKING TO JUST ISAKU, AND A HAND-FUL OF PEOPLE.

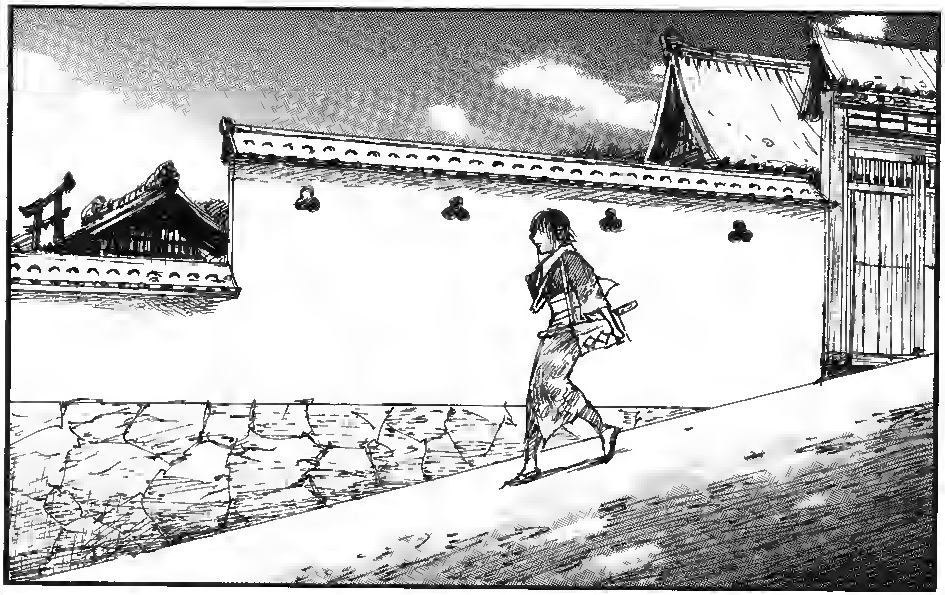
SO WHAT IS THEIR RELATION-SHIP?
TOO DIFFER-ENT TO BE SIBLINGS. DON'T HAVE THAT FUSSY MARRIED COUPLE THING. IN FACT--
--ONLY DŌA IS ARMED!
MAYBE SAMURAI DAUGHTER AND... SERVANT?
....
....
Ahem!
DŌA--- OR SO I'LL CALL YOU.
I'LL BE DIRECT.

PREDICATED ON YOU NATURALLY COMPENSATING ME FOR THE WALL... WILL YOU PLEASE EXPLAIN JUST WHY YOU DID IT?
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
WINDOW.
THERE ARE WINDOWS THERE ALREADY!
YOU SEE RENJI, RIGHT?! FROM WALL TO WALL!
NO, NOT LIKE THOSE.
A HOLE, TO GET IN AND OUT.

NOW LOOK HERE! THIS DŌJŌ DOESN'T NEED ANOTHER DOOR!
IT'S CONNECTED TO THE HOUSE!
SKINNY LITTLE WINDOWS.
THE GOOD GODS CAN'T GET IN.
WE NEED A REAL WINDOW, SO THE OFFERINGS TO THE BAD GODS AND THE GOOD GODS'LL GO IN AND OUT.
...I KNEW EXACTLY WHAT WAS WRONG. IF IT'S NOT MADE RIGHT...
...THE BAD GODS'LL GET STUCK INSIDE.
IN THE VILLAGE WHERE I GREW UP, ALL THE HOUSES HAD THEM. WHEN YOU SAID BAD THINGS HAPPENED HERE...
SHE MEANS LIKE, THAT FENG SHUI STUFF ON THE CONTI-NENT?

WELL, THAT MAKES IT HARDER TO THROW THEM OUT.
I-I'M SORRY.
BUT I'M MAKING DARN SURE THEY FIX IT.
YOU DON'T HAVE TO APOLOGIZE...
LISTEN, I'VE--
I'VE GOT THINGS TO DO.
UH...
SO...FIX 'FORE YOU GET BACK... SOMEHOW.
AND MAKE DOA HELP, TOO.
HEH...? EHH!
THAT... THAT'S KINDA HARD.

YOU HAVE TO!!
DROP DEAD.
UHH... YES'M.
GIRLS LIKE THAT HERE.



MANJI DIDN'T COME BACK AFTER ALL.

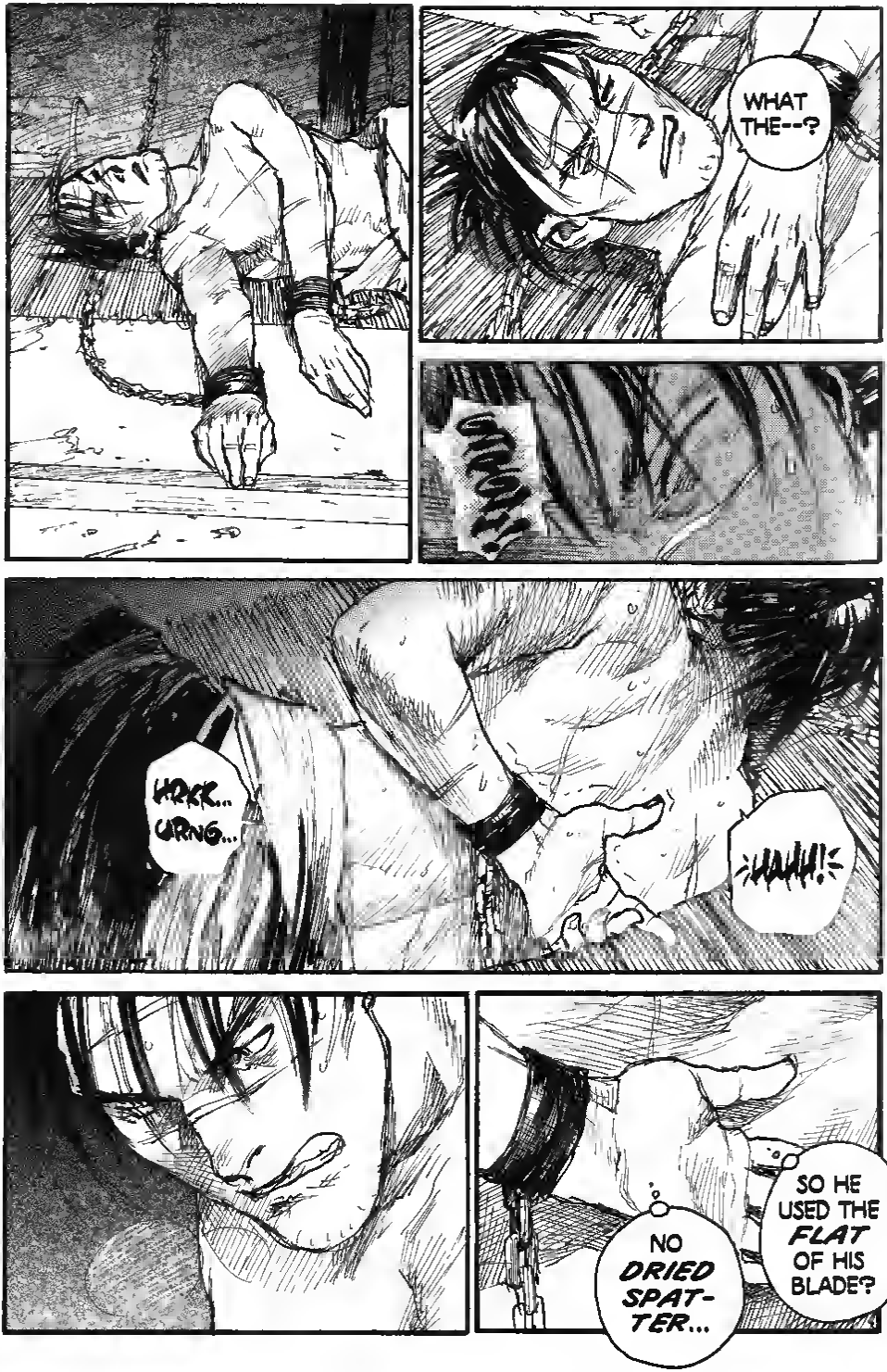
I JUST FEEL HE'S STILL IN THAT HOUSE.
SOMEHOW... FEMALE INTUITION, MAYBE?
SIGN: HABAKI
HOW DO YOU... READ THAT NAME?
"HAKU"...?
BUT IF MANJI'S BUSY IN THERE, HE'D AT LEAST SEND ME A MESSAGE.
SILENCE MEANS...HE'S CAPTURED, THROWN IN JAIL, OR...
THROW HIM IN JAIL?
SEEMS A LITTLE LATE FOR THAT TO HAPPEN.
SO, NO. NOT THAT...

.....
.....
.....
IF MANJI *IS* IN THERE, OR EVEN IF HE'S *NOT*...
...I BET THEY'LL JUST RUN ME OFF IF I ASK.

IF... IF ONLY...
...I HADN'T GONE ALONG WHEN HYAKURIN INVITED ME.
NO! DON'T THINK THAT! SHE WAS JUST BEING KIND.
BLAME THIS IDIOT GIRL, FOR THINKING WITH HER STOMACH.
IT ALL START-ED... WITH GIICHI...?
HE INVITED MANJI! THAT'S WHY MANJI CAME HERE.
WHICH MEANS—
IT'S GOT SOMETHING TO DO WITH...THE MUGAI-RYU?

WHICH MEANS...
...HYAKU-RIN MIGHT KNOW SOMETHING AFTER ALL!

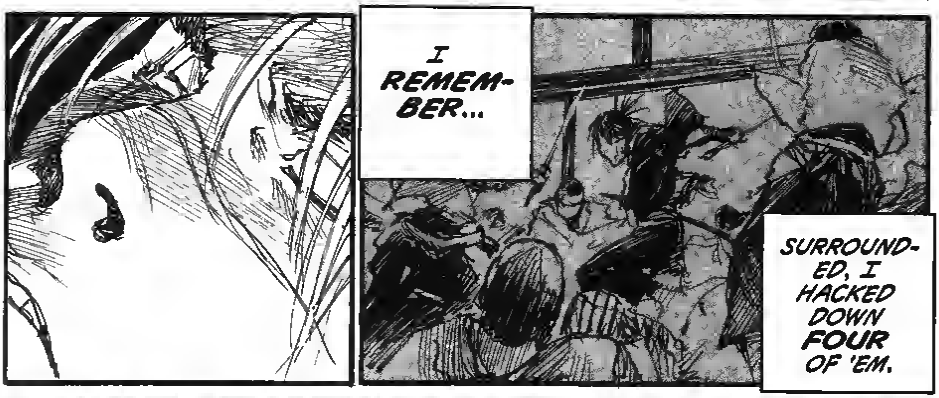
HNNG...


WHAT THE--?
HORR... URNG...
AHHH!
NO DRIED SPAT-TER...
SO HE USED THE FLAT OF HIS BLADE?

AND
THIS
PLACE...?
HEY
!!

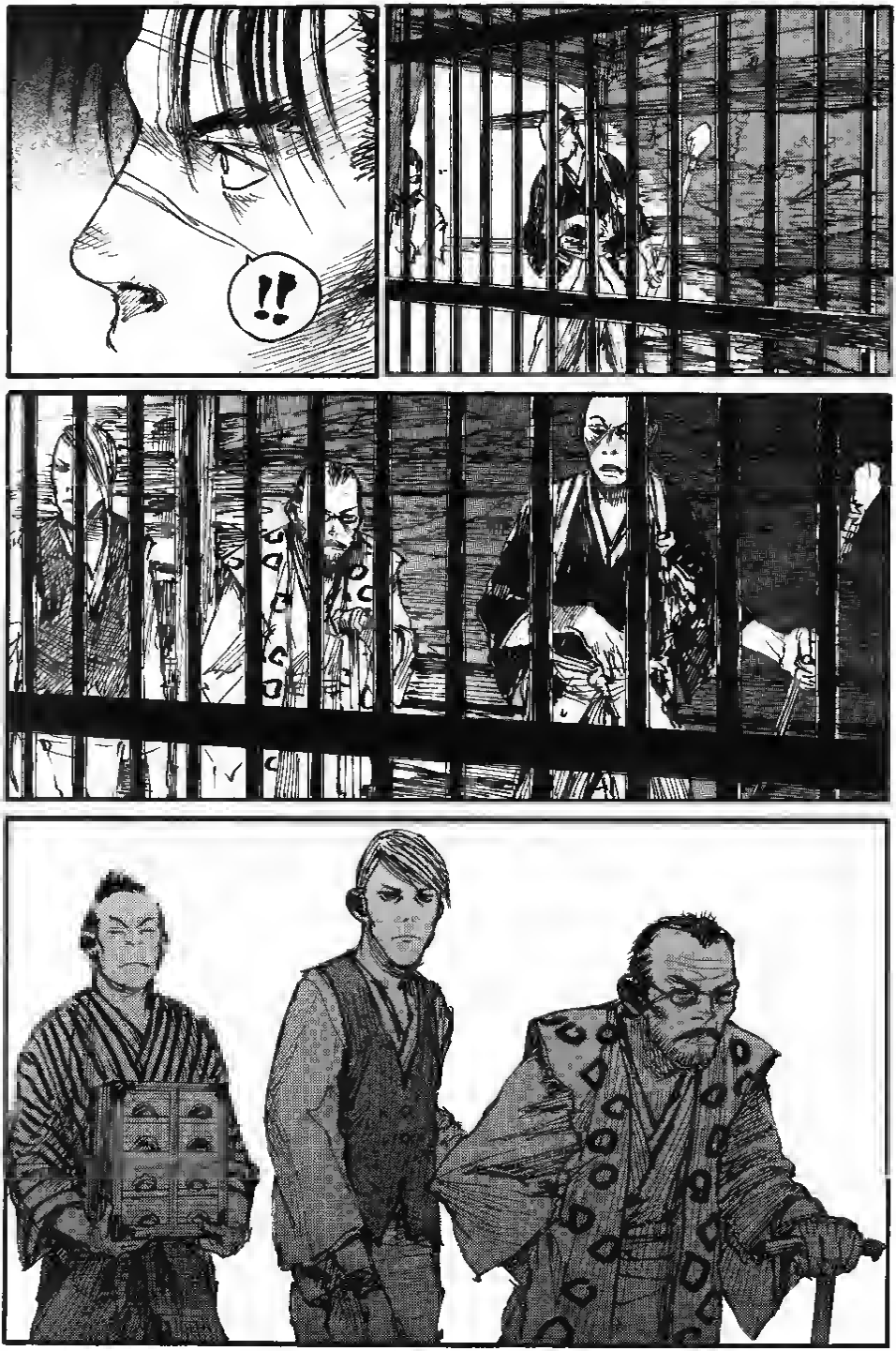
HE'S UP?!
HEY! YOU DICK-HEAD!
.....
.....
WHAT'S HIS PROBLEM?

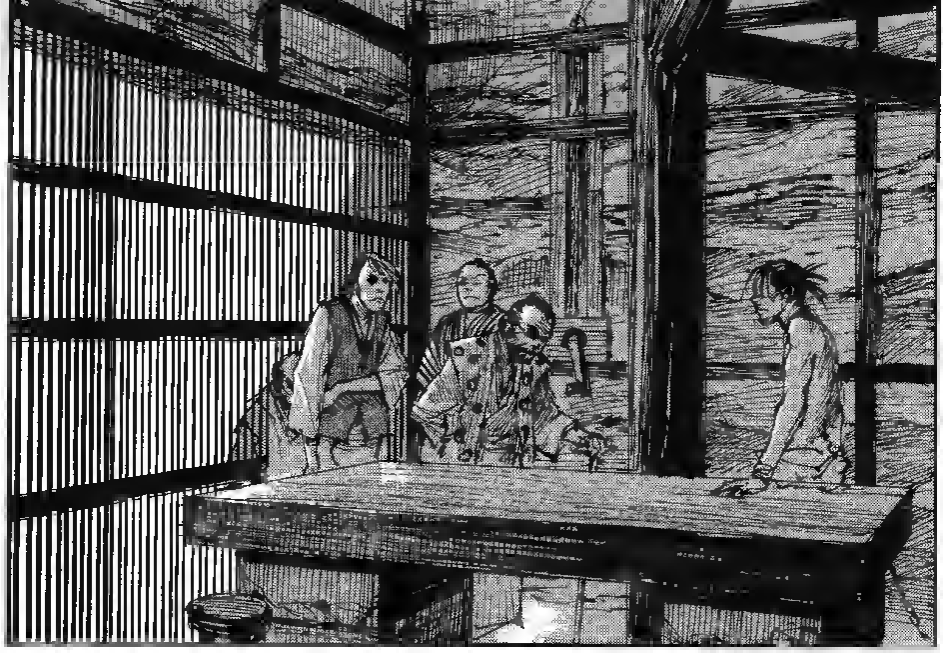
...


I REMEMBER...
SURROUNDED, I HACKED DOWN FOUR OF 'EM.

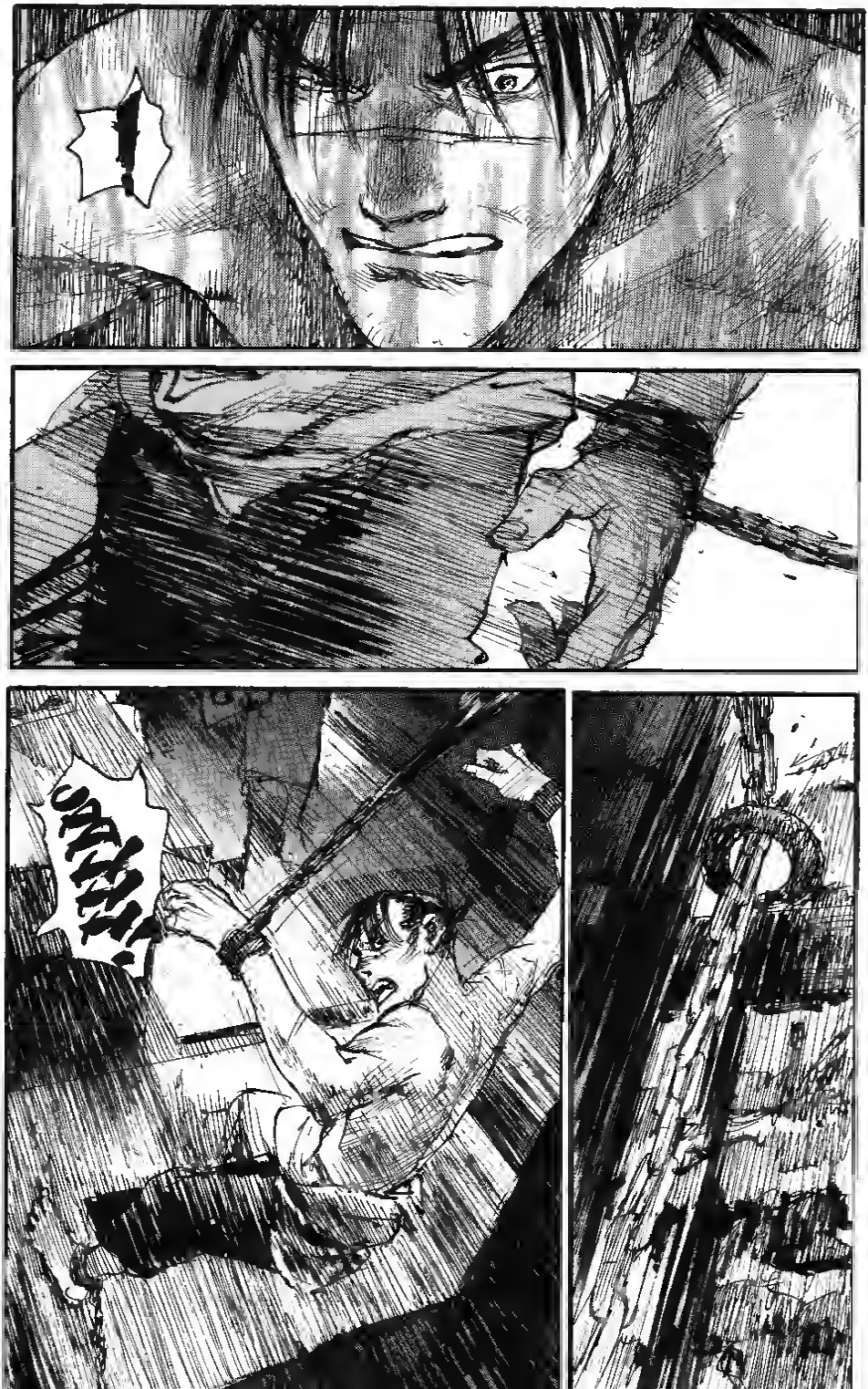
THEN HE DREW.

I'LL BUTCHER YOU!!
THAT FRIGGIN' SON OF A BITCH
SO...
...WHERE THE HELL IS THIS PLACE ANYWAY...?
AN IRON CAGE?
KINDA OVER THE TOP...
...FOR JUST ONE DUDE.
PLUS THIS THING...
HEH.
ARE THEY BRINGING ME A SUSHI CHEF?





KSHANG
KSHNNG
KSHNNG
KSHNNG
KSHNG


!
NO!!

AGAIN

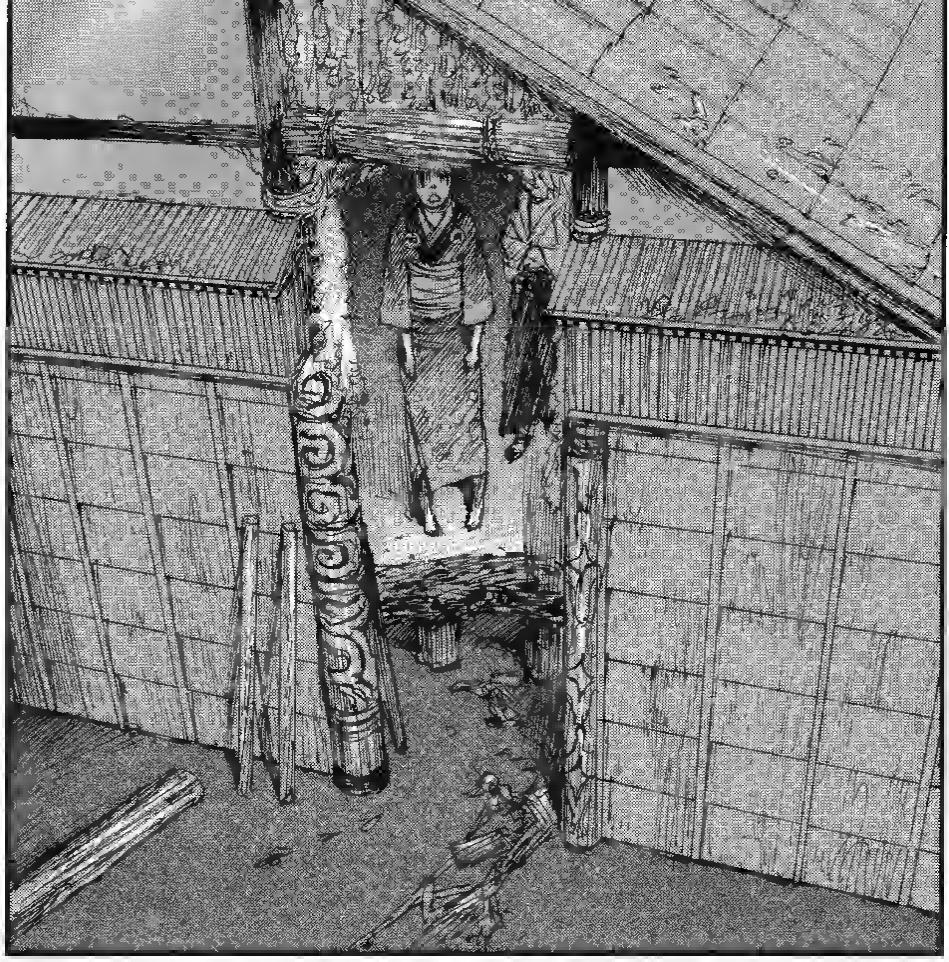
NNGH!
F--

THAT FRIGGIN HURT, MAN!
YOU FUCKERS !!

ALLOW ME TO GO FIRST!
TOTALLY... EXHAUSTED

I DIDN'T FIND MANJI...
...OR HYAKURIN, AFTER ALL.
YOU REALLY CAN'T...
...FIND FOLKS WHEN YOU WANT THEM.
sniff...
HAH?!
W-WELCOME HOME.
OH, HELLO.
I... I MADE RICE. AND GRILLED FISH.
WANNA JOIN US?

OH! THANK YOU! UHM...
DID... DID A MAN COME BY?
UH- UH.
EH? NO...
OH...
RIGHT! WHAT ABOUT THE WALL?!
SMAK
EH?!
UHHH... HUH. THAT, AHHH, DIDN'T MAKE MUCH...
.....
.....
.....



YOU TURNED IT INTO A DOOR?!
I'M... I'M S- SORRY...
NOT BAD. NOT BAD AT ALL.
WE ARE NOT IN YOUR OLD VILLAGE, RIGHT? AM I RIGHT?!
TO BE CONTINUED...

NEXT MONTH:
SHORTCUT, Part 1 of 5

Hiroaki Samura steers *Blade of the Immortal* into darker depths with his "Shortcut" story arc! Visceral horror takes center stage, as this masterful manga series explores man's hunger for immortality and the early years of "modern Japanese medicine." Also, as Hyakurin and Rin step up their search for Manji, Hyakurin receives some shocking news.

Send letters and fan art to
BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL, c/o DARK HORSE COMICS, 10956 SE MAIN STREET, MILWAUKIE, OREGON 97222
www.darkhorse.com • blade@darkhorse.com
All fan artwork, letters and e-mails submitted become the property of Dark Horse Comics

GLOSSARY

Ainu (see *Ezo*)

Bakufu: The central government and bureaucracy that grew up around the Tokugawa Shogunate. Originally established in Edo by the warlord Tokugawa Ieyasu.

Bangashira: Head of the *banshū*.

Banshū: Officers serving under the Shogun, usually assigned to Edo Castle to defend the Shogun himself.

Dōjō: A school for combat and self-defense training in martial arts; here, a training center for swordsmanship.

Ezo: Edo Period name for the *Ainu*, natives of the Japanese archipelago who were driven north by today's modern Japanese population, now found only on the northern main island of Hokkaido.

Feng Shui: The ancient Chinese system of positioning and arranging objects, buildings, and space to achieve harmony with the environment and personal peace, based on beliefs that involve the flow of *chi*, *yin* and *yang* and the natural elements.

Ittō-ryū: The radical sword school of Anotsu Kagehisa.

Kessen-chu: The "sacred bloodworms." A person infected by them cannot die but feels pain like a mortal.

Kessen-satsu: "Bloodworm killer." A poison used to counteract the *kessen-chu*.

Mugai-ryū: Criminals working as assassins for the Shogunate, earning their freedom by killing assigned targets; literally, "without form."

Mutenichi-ryū: The sword school led by Rin's father (now deceased), destroyed by Anotsu Kagehisa.

Nanban: Southern barbarians. Westerners were called this because their ships first reached Japan from the South and their manners were considered quite rude.

Renji: Slatted ventilation windows.

Ryū: A sword school.

Shamo: *Ainu* term for the Japanese.

ABOUT THE SWASTIKA

The main character in *Blade of the Immortal*, Manji, has taken the "crux gammata" as both his name and his personal symbol. This symbol is also known as the *swastika*, a name derived from the Sanskrit *svastika* (meaning "welfare," from *su* — "well" + *asti* — "he is"). As a symbol of prosperity and good fortune, the *swastika* was widely used throughout the ancient world (for example, appearing often on Mesopotamian coinage), including North and South America and has been used in Japan as a symbol of Buddhism since ancient times. To be precise, the symbol generally used by Japanese Buddhists is the *sauvastika*, which moves in a counterclockwise direction and is called the *manji* in Japanese. The *sauvastika* generally stands for night and often for magical practices. The *swastika*, whose arms point in a clockwise direction, is generally considered a solar symbol. It was this version (the *hakenkreuz*) that was perverted by the Nazis. It is important that readers understand that the *swastika* has ancient and honorable origins, and it is those that apply to this story, which takes place in the 18th century (ca. 1782-3). *There is no anti-Semitic or pro-Nazi meaning behind the use of the symbol in this story. Those meanings did not exist until after 1910.*

ABOUT THE TRANSLATION

The Artwork: The author of *Blade of the Immortal* requested that we make an effort to avoid mirror-imaging his artwork. Some manga are first copied in a mirror-image in order to facilitate the left-to-right reading of the pages. However, Mr. Samura decided that he would rather see his pages reversed via the technique of cutting up the panels and repasting them in reverse order. While we feel that this often leads to problems in panel-to-panel continuity, we place primary importance on the wishes of the creator. Therefore, most of *Blade of the Immortal* has been produced using the "cut and paste" technique. There are, of course, some sequences where it was impossible to do this, and mirror-imaged panels or pages were used instead.

The Sound Effects & Dialogue: Since some of Mr. Samura's sound effects are integral parts of the artwork, the decision was made to leave those in their original Japanese. When it was crucial to the understanding of the panel that the sound effect be in English, however, Mr. Samura chose to redraw the panel. We hope readers will view the un-retouched sound effects as essential portions of Mr. Samura's extraordinary artwork. In addition, Mr. Samura's treatment of dialogue is quite different from that featured in average samurai manga and is considered to be one of the things that has made *Blade* such a huge hit in Japan. Mr. Samura has mixed a variety of linguistic styles in this fantasy story, where some characters speak in the mannered style of old Japan, while others speak as if they were street corner punks from a bad area of modern-day Tokyo. The anachronistic slang used by some of the characters in the English translation reflects the unusual mix of speech patterns from the original Japanese text.

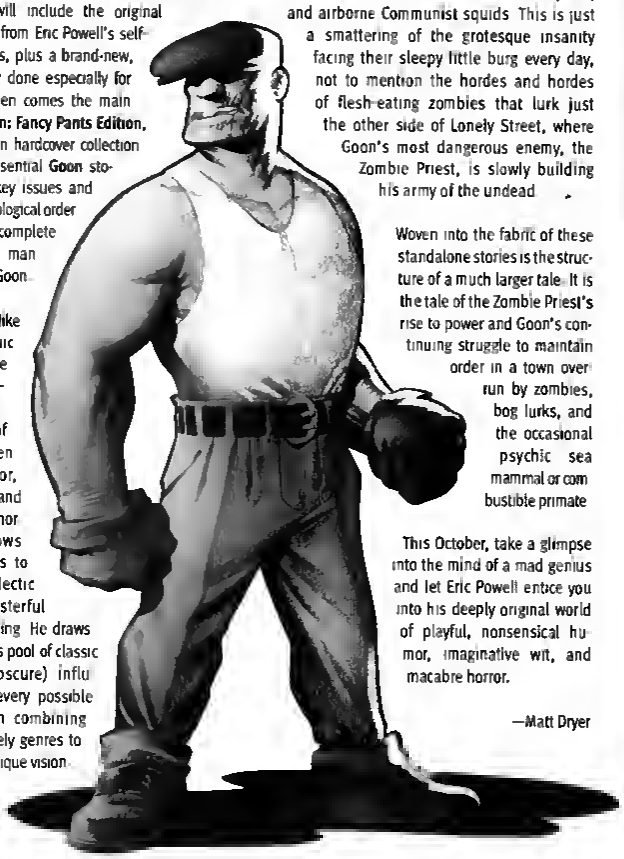
HORSEPOWER

After years of reading comics, I've found that two things are becoming harder and harder for creators to do: be funny and be original. In the bi-monthly series, The Goon, Eric Powell manages to do both. In fact, he makes it look easy.

In response to a die-hard fan base, a growing presence in the industry, and a slew of media accolades and awards (including three Will Eisner Comic Industry Awards), Dark Horse decided it was high time to give this book the spotlight. That is why we are officially celebrating October 2005 as "Goon Month."

We kick the whole thing off with a 25¢ preview issue which will include the original **Goon** #1 issue from Eric Powell's self-publishing days, plus a brand-new, four-page story done especially for this promo. Then comes the main event: **The Goon: Fancy Pants Edition**, a limited-edition hardcover collection of the most essential **Goon** stories cut from key issues and placed in chronological order to give you a complete history of the man known only as Goon.

The Goon is unlike any other comic book on the stands today—an outlandish blend of character-driven drama, horror, science fiction, and off-the-wall humor. Powell borrows from all genres to create an eclectic goulash of masterful comics storytelling. He draws from an endless pool of classic (and often obscure) influences out of every possible medium, often combining the most unlikely genres to create a truly unique vision.



You'll find allusions to everything from Universal Monsters to Andy Griffith, from Harvey Kurtzman to Monty Python, Bob Dylan and beyond, spun together in the most eccentric possible ways. Meanwhile, hints of Will Eisner, Wally Wood, and even Norman Rockwell shine through in his ever-evolving art style.

THE GOON™

Every issue is a self-contained story, offering new readers the chance to jump on board at any point. Every story is a two-fisted tale of adventure as Goon and his sidekick Franky defend their town from all manner of monstrosities, ghouls, and freaks—giant undead primates, cannibalistic hoboes, killer robots, mad scientists, vampires, and airborne Communist squids. This is just a smattering of the grotesque insanity facing their sleepy little burg every day, not to mention the hordes and hordes of flesh-eating zombies that lurk just the other side of Lonely Street, where Goon's most dangerous enemy, the Zombie Priest, is slowly building his army of the undead.

Woven into the fabric of these standalone stories is the structure of a much larger tale. It is the tale of the Zombie Priest's rise to power and Goon's continuing struggle to maintain order in a town overrun by zombies, bog lurks, and the occasional psychic sea mammal or combustible primate.

This October, take a glimpse into the mind of a mad genius and let Eric Powell entice you into his deeply original world of playful, nonsensical humor, imaginative wit, and macabre horror.

—Matt Dryer

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OCTOBER 2005

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